

2017

## Shanghainese parklife: Cultivating the Taoist body and exploring the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape

Brenton Mark Rossow  
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# **Shanghainese Parklife:**

**Cultivating the Taoist body and exploring the traces of the absent  
figure and creature in the landscape.**

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**Bachelor of Creative Industries (Film and Video)**

**This exegesis is presented in partial fulfillment for the Bachelor of Creative  
Industries Honours**

**School of Arts and Humanities  
Edith Cowan University**

**2017**

# Edith Cowan University

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## **Abstract**

This creative Honours project explores Taoist body cultivation practices and the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape within Shanghainese parks. This exploration, presented in the form of a documentary and an audiovisual meditation, share a yin and yang relationship. Although they both contain elements of each other, the documentary celebrates body cultivation practices and their relationship to Taoism, while the audiovisual meditation examines the darker side of human relationships with the natural world in Shanghainese parks. Informed by Rod Giblett's and Brian Eno's theories concerning the human body's relationship with the environment and the natural world, and Taoism's most significant philosophers Lao Tzu (ca. 600-400 BC) and Chuang Tzu (ca. 550-250 BC), it seeks to find a place in which the Tao and its manifestations coexist.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my respect and admiration for all the participants in *Shanghainese Parklife – Cultivating The Taoist Body*, who gave their time, hearts, wisdom, and kindness. Their willingness to participate in the documentary allowed me to be a part of a world that is very dear to me. My good friend Larry Lai, who gave his time to research Taoism, and prepared for our interviews, was vital to the project's success. The talented people who spent many long hours helping with translations and subtitles, deserve a great deal of thanks, as do, Ivy Penny and Darren Tynan, who provided support and useful feedback throughout my research. Clive Barstow, Bethany Andersson, the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, and Edith Cowan University, also provided crucial assistance throughout the project. Tanja Visosevic, my supervisor, has never failed to guide me in a positive direction or offer assistance. She is an inspiration and a Star. And to friends and family who have encouraged me as I have followed the Tao, I thank you very BIG.

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## **Introduction**

Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophical practice that encourages people to live in unison with nature and follow the Taoist ‘Way’. The Taoist Way encourages spontaneity, naturalness, action through non-action (wu wei), and human-heartedness over human constructs, such as fixed perceptions of reality and codes of conduct created by society as a whole (Miller, 2008; Watts, 2011; Robinet, 1997). A core Taoist concept known as yin and yang—represented by a symbol, which depicts the entwinement of black and white in equal proportions within a sphere—expresses the interconnected relationship of all things within the universe (Robinet, 1997, p. 7).



*Fig. 0.1: Taoist Yin and Yang symbol (Kohn, 2006)*

According to Taoist beliefs, yin and yang are not necessarily representations of good and bad, but instead symbolize codependence, regardless of perceived positive or negative attributes (Tzu, 300 BC/2015, p. 2)

For more than 2, 500 years, the philosophies of Taoism’s most significant philosophers, Lao Tzu (ca. 600-400 BC) and Chuang Tzu (ca. 550-250 BC) (Robinet, 1997, p. 25), have influenced numerous body cultivation practices that are performed in China, such as Tai chi, Kung fu, and Qigong (Kohn, 2006). While the influence of Taoism in activities such as Tai chi may appear obvious, in other body cultivation practices performed in the parks of Shanghai, Taoist philosophies may be less transparent.

Giblett (2008b) suggests that the ‘Taoist body of the earth’ is interconnected with the land and does not seek dominance over its environment (p. 157). He believes, “the

body of the earth is a body with organs – and muscles and bones and flows of energy, of *chi*” (p. 190). If chi does not flow freely through the human body and the earth, imbalances occur in both humans and the landscape. Therefore the health of the human body is matched with the health of nature and the earth (Kohn, 2006, p. 4).

Brian Eno’s ambient landscapes are often described as having a “breath” (Roquet, 2009, p. 371), a “pulse” (Tamm, 1989, p. 141), or a “tone colour” (p. 138) as opposed to having a beat. His ambient landscapes reflect core Taoist principles that suggest that humans are inextricably entwined with their environment. Eno’s ambient landscapes have often been described as “meditative music” or “healing music”, however, Harold Budd, a long-term collaborator, believes Eno’s ambient landscapes come from a “darker corner of the human psyche” (Holmes, 2008, p. 401).

Although the parks in Shanghai offer people a place to escape the pressures of harsh urban environments, and heal their physical and mental health by participating in body cultivation practices, the self-absorbed side of human nature does not approach the landscape from a conservationist’s perspective. The issue of people discarding unwanted waste within Shanghainese parks, explored in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*, is by no means ‘just a Chinese problem’. It is a phenomenon that exists across the globe.

In *The body of nature and culture*, Giblett (2008b) presents an array of perceptions concerning the ways in which humans approach the body and make meaning through its form (p. x). He suggests that the grotesque body:

is the belching, farting, gluttonous, lusting, creative, procreative body; it is a body having sex, giving birth, being born, eating, shitting, living and dying; it is the body of the market place (as distinct from the market) and it is the popular body (as distinct from the official body). (Giblett, 2008b p. 56).

Although many of the characters in Chuang Tzu’s (300 BC/1996) narratives may appear grotesque in their physical forms, they are often portrayed as heroes or possess admirable or virtuous qualities. Chuang Tzu’s philosophies use ‘freaks’ such as hunchbacks who effortlessly catch more cicadas than the average person (Tzu, 1996, p. 120) to challenge society’s perceptions of the grotesque body and to commend the virtue of the person within.

While the documentary *Shanghai Parklife* (2017) expresses humankind's desire to embrace Taoist philosophies that speak of a desire to entwine with nature and heal the human body and soul, *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* reveals the grotesque body comfortably at war with itself and the body of the earth. Unlike Chuang Tzu's "freaks", who have been misinterpreted by members of society who have lost the Taoist Way, the grotesque absent figure in the landscape within Shanghai parks gives birth to a darker manifestation of the Tao.

In my quest to understand the simplistic, complex, dark and light, good and bad, mysterious, beautiful, funny, colourful faces of the Tao in Shanghai parks, I adopted a yin and yang perspective when conducting my research. Although the idealistic part of me romanticized Taoist body cultivation practices and wanted to be healthy and at one with the earth, inspired by the philosophies of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, I searched for meaning in the mystery and manifestations of the Tao.

## **Research Aims and Questions**

This creative research project was conducted with the intention of creating two creative works that share a yin and yang relationship. The first component, representative of yin, was to create a documentary that explored how Taoist philosophies have influenced body cultivation practices within Shanghai parks. The second component, representative of yang, was to create an audiovisual meditation that combined an ambient soundscape with photographic images of the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape within Shanghai parks. In this exegesis, the influences of Rod Giblett's theories concerning the Taoist body of the earth, Bill Nichols' six modes of documentary, Chuang Tzu's philosophies, and Brian Eno's theories concerning the entwinement of the figure with the landscape, have been applied and discussed in relation to this creative work.

**Main question 1:** In what ways do people in Shanghai express Taoist philosophies through body cultivation practices within the parks of Shanghai?

**Main question 2:** In what ways does the Tao manifest itself within an audiovisual meditation that combines an ambient soundscape inspired by Brian Eno's theories concerning the entwinement of the figure within landscape and images of the absent figure and creature in the landscape within Shanghainese parks?

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

### **The Taoist body of the earth**

In Taoism, the human body is not separate from the earth: it is interconnected and considered to be one entity (Giblett, 2008b; Kohn, 2006; Schipper, 1978). This Taoist perspective, which views the human body, mind and the earth's landscape as one, is represented by a nineteenth century image known as the *Neijing tu* (Callicott & McRae, 2015, p. 237).



Fig. 1.1: *Neijing tu* (Ming-shun shu-chu, 1967)

In the *Neijing tu*, the mountainous human head leads to a pagoda within the throat, which connects to a river that flows through the spinal cord. Other features of the

natural world represent different parts of the human anatomy; a mulberry grove exists in the liver, and the kidneys contain a paddy field (Schipper, 1978, p. 356). This view of the human body as a landscape promotes ecologically health conscious relationships between humans and their environments (Callicott & McRae, 2015; Giblett, 2008b; Girardot, Miller, & Liu, 2001), in that, humankind becomes more aware of imbalances in their own physical forms, mirrored by nature, and seeks to heal the body and earth (Giblett, 2008a).

Giblett (1996) suggests that water—“the lifeblood of the earth”—is detoxified and nutrients are stored within the wetlands, which are represented by the kidneys in the *Neijing tu* (p. 137). He argues that stagnant water is unhealthy in the human body and earth, and water must flow through the earth and human form or both “will die” (Giblett, 2008b, p. 181). Kohn (2006) further elaborates upon Giblett’s perspective by suggesting that “qi is the foundational energy of the universe, the basic stuff of the Dao, the life force in the human body, and the basis of all physical vitality” (p. 3).

In *the Taoist body* (1993), Schipper presents us with a verse from an ancient Chinese text, which suggests a deep relationship between the human body and the environment (p. 101).

Each region produces its class of beings. Thus the wind of the mountains produces many males; that of the lakes, females; obstructed winds produce mutes; heavy winds deaf people; in the forest one finds many stooped people, for the breeze of the woods makes one hunchbacked; people living under rocky shelters often have inflated bellies, for the winds of rocks make one solid. (Huai-nan tzu, as cited in Schipper, 1993, p. 101)

This Taoist perception of the interconnected human body and earth is different from Western thought concerning the environment and the human form (Clarke, 2000; Callicott & McRae, 2015; Giblett 2008a). Watts’ (1991) idea that Western perceptions “tend to regard nature, human and otherwise, as a world to be conquered and reordered” (p. 3) gives credence to eco-conservationist arguments that suggest Western societies damage rather than nurture the earth (Allan, 1997; Giblett, 2013; Watts, 1999).

Miller (2012), however, proposes, that the struggle between humans and nature “has deep roots within Chinese culture and history,” and began long before China’s cultural revolution (p. 2). This view indicates that although Taoism has widely influenced Chinese thought, the innate will to degrade both the human body and the environment in many cases surpasses Taoist philosophies that encourage the union of humanity and the earth (Callicott & McRae, 2015, Giblett, 2008b; Girardot, Miller, & Liu, 2001).

Kohn (2006) suggests that egotism and greed in Western cultures is often rooted in the idea that humans have bodies, and that “those bodies have needs that have to be satisfied” (p. 2). This results in deleterious practices, which can affect not only individuals, but also societies and the environment (Martell, 1995; Moran, 2006, Rubenstein, 1989).

Giblett’s perspective (2008b) of Western medical thought, which views the ‘machine body of Western medicine’ (p. 19) as a battlefield and the doctor as a general, is vastly different from ‘the Taoist body of the earth’ (p. 157) that considers the human body to be a field that cultivates itself and attempts to “pull out weeds” or diseases whenever it can (p. xii). In *The body of nature and culture* (2008b), Giblett’s view of the machine body of Western medicine and the Taoist body of the earth, describes two contrasting models (2008b, p. xiii).

**Table 1: Machine body of Western medicine and the Taoist body of the earth**

<b>Machine body of Western medicine</b>	<b>Taoist body of the Earth</b>
Body is a battlefield	Body is a field
Disease is the enemy	Disease is a weed
Patient is a foot soldier	Patient is a gardener who pulls out weeds whenever they can
Doctor is a general	
Nurse is an officer	
Western medicine is a weapon	

These contrasting models indicate significant differences between Eastern Taoist thought and modern Western approaches towards the body and health. Giblett (2008b) argues that the Taoist perception of the body as a field, the disease as a weed, and the patient as a gardener, provides a “much more environmentally- and bodily-friendly figure than the body as battlefield” (p. xii). In *Tao: The watercourse Way* (2011), Watts shares Giblett’s ideas concerning the organic nature of the human body and suggests that “the body is not a surgical construct put together with scalpels, clamps, and sutures. We must make a distinction between an organism which is differentiated and a machine which is partitive” (p. 51).

In *Health recovery: The Taoist Tai Chi Way* (2008a), Giblett presents ideas as to how activities such as Tai chi and Taoist meditation can connect us to the earth, and result in ecologically beneficial relationships between humans and the environment (p. 112). These Taoist body cultivation practices, influenced by the philosophies of Lao Tzu (300 BC/2015) and Chuang Tzu (300 BC/1996) (Wile, 2007, p. 37), have an ancient history, which can be traced back more than 2, 500 years (Green, 2001, p. 26).

Although Western thought in the mid-eighteenth century regarded Taoist body cultivation practices such as Tai chi and Taoist meditation as “escapist”, “narcissistic” and “a form of stoic apathy” (Clarke, 2000, p. 124), these ancient practices have well-documented health benefits supported by medical practitioners and scientific evidence (Kohn, 2006, p. 198). The Taoist body cultivation practice of meditation involves slow “embryonic breathing” that attempts to imitate breathing patterns adopted by fetuses in the womb. This practice is conducted in order to return Taoists to their prenatal state, which is thought to promote longevity (Clarke, 2000, p. 125).

Cleary (2000) believes that in Taoist meditation a person’s state of mind is fundamental to “the well-being and efficiency of the whole organism” (p. 2). Kohn (2006) supports this idea by suggesting that if there is an imbalance of qi in humans and nature it can cause freak weather patterns, floods, and even locust plagues (Kohn, 2006, p.4). In Taoism’s most significant text, the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu (2015) states “The Tao is called the Great Mother: empty yet inexhaustible, it gives birth to infinite worlds” (p. 5)



In *the Tao of Water* (2013), Giblett provides a highly poetic description of how Taijiquan or Tai chi connects the body to the earth, and allows multiple perspectives that result in health benefits for both humans and the environment (p. 3). He states:

The slow, graceful movements of taijiquan are like a gentle flowing river; the stillness in movement and the movement in stillness of taijiquan are like the still waters of a wooded wetland reflecting the heavens above; the moving meditation of taijiquan is like a deep ocean pool full of waving and weaving mysteries; the power and grace of taijiquan is like a serpentine stream curving and straightening through the body of the earth. (Giblett, 2013, pp. 3-4)

Like the aforementioned passage written by Huai-nan tzu, cited by Schipper in *the Taoist body* (1993, p. 101), Giblett's (2013) ideas concerning the relationship between the human body and the environment express the same ideas as the Neijing tu: that humans are inextricably entwined with their environment and that "the health of one is the health of the other for we are one body, the body of the earth" (Giblett, 2008b, p. 190).

## **The influence of Chuang Tzu's philosophies upon Chinese Martial arts**

During The Warring States Period (403-222 BC), one of Taoism's most significant philosophers, Chuang Tzu, wrote a collection of highly descriptive narratives (Robinet, 1997, p. 25), that can be found in *Chuang Tzu: Basic writings* (300 BC/1996). These narratives that contain an assortment of unlikely heroes, reflect fundamental Taoist philosophies that have influenced Chinese culture and body cultivation practices, such as Chinese martial arts (Allen, 2014; Fowler, 2005; Wile, 2007). Although Taoism may not have influenced Chinese martial arts in its earliest forms, through a process of absorption and evolution, Chinese martial arts have adopted many core Taoist principles, resulting in more Taoist-centered martial arts such as Taijiquan or, as it is known in the west, Tai chi (Cleary, 2000; Giblett, 2008a; Miller, 2008).

To illustrate this point, I would like to examine the first narrative within the chapter Mastering Life (pp. 118-130), in which a character named Confucius encounters a hunchback with a sticky pole, catching cicadas as effortlessly as though he were using

his bare hands. When Confucius asks him if he has a particular method, the hunchback replies:

I have a way. For the first five or six months I practice balancing two balls on top of each other on the end of the pole, and if they don't fall off, I know I will lose very few cicadas. Then I balance three balls, and if they don't fall off, I know I'll only lose one cicada in ten. (Tzu, 300 BC/1996, p. 120)

While the hunchback's initial response indicates he has cultivated his abilities through mere sustained practice, after further conversation, it is evident his methods contain important Taoist philosophical concepts also found in Chinese martial arts.

I hold my body like a stiff tree trunk and use my body like an old dry limb. No matter how huge the heaven and earth or how numerous the ten thousand things, I'm aware of nothing but cicada wings. (Tzu, 300 BC/1996, p. 121)

When an individual manifests the essence of Taoism or *the way*, it is known as *Te* or virtue (Watts, 2011, p. 106). The hunchback in Chuang Tzu's narrative is an example of the embodiment of the Taoist way. Although *Te* was not a concept expressed in ancient Chinese martial arts (Green, 2001), practitioners such as Zhang Sanfeng adopted Taoist principles and adapted them to new forms of martial arts (Clarke, 2000, p. 137). Zhang Sanfeng—the father of Taijiquan—is said to have created an early version of what is commonly known today as Tai chi after witnessing a battle between a crane and a snake (Fowler & Ewers, 2005). This incident spurred Zhang Sanfeng to create a series of seventy-two Taijiquan movements, such as *White Crane Spreads Wings* and *Snake Creeps Down*, which are still practiced in Tai chi today (p. 33).

Like Chuang Tzu, Zhang Sanfeng understood the value of being skeptical of ideas concerning human limitations and embraced concepts of perspectivism, which disregarded the constructs of perceived 'realities', in order to explore new possibilities (Connolly, 2011, p. 487). In advanced Tai chi, practitioners are able to reach a state where it requires minimal effort to move their physical bodies by "moving their minds" (Kohn, 2006, p. 182). In much the same way the hunchback imagined his body to be like that of a tree, Zhang Sanfeng realized that by focusing

his mind and adopting the characteristics of animals in tune with the natural world, his body could transcend its human limitations (Fowler & Ewers, 2005).

Instead of being limited by his physical deformity, the hunchback in Chuang Tzu's narrative cultivates the capabilities of his outer body by first cultivating his inner body. This process is referred to as inner alchemy (Clarke, 2000, p. 124). Inner alchemy includes Taoist body cultivation practices such as breathing techniques, dieting, and sexual practices, which stress the importance of mastering the mind in order to control the will of the body (Kohn, 2006).

In the chapter *Mastering Life*, Chuang Tzu speaks about the necessary balance between body and mind (p. 118), in order to obtain virtue (*Te*). Chuang Tzu's (300 B.C/1996) idea of virtue in regards to "The Perfect Man" (p. 119) differs from Confucius's idea that virtue is gained through morality and proper conduct (Watts, 1999, p. 10). In Taoism, virtue is present when an individual wholeheartedly embraces life's spontaneity and expresses the essence of "the Tao" or "Way" (Allan, 1997, p. 101). This concept is illustrated by the following passage:

When a drunken man falls from a carriage, though the carriage may be going very fast, he won't be killed. He has bones and joints the same as other men, and yet he is not injured, as they would be, because his spirit is whole. He didn't know he was riding, and he doesn't know he has fallen out. (Tzu, 300 BC/1996, p. 119)

Contemporary Tai chi teaches individuals to relax when they encounter the spontaneity of the universe. *Fangsong*, or relax, is one of the first principles individuals learn before engaging in more advanced practices such as 'push hands', in which the primary focus is to uproot a partner's connection with the earth during the spontaneity of a non-violent exchange (Kohn, 2006, p. 191). Whereas previous forms of martial arts, such as Shaolin, encouraged their practitioners to attack and adopt principles of hardness and speed (Wile, 2007), Taijiquan embraces Taoist notions of "softness", "stillness", and "the emptying of self" (p. 22).

Schipper's idea that "taijiquan is an excellent initiation into the very essentials of Taoism," (1993, p. 138) raises evolutionary questions about Taoism and martial arts,

in that, the question arises as to whether Taoism influenced martial arts or martial arts influenced Taoism. Allen (2014) suggests Taoism's most significant philosophers, Lao Tzu (ca. 600-400 BC) and Chuang Tzu (ca. 550-250 BC), "did not know about martial arts" and that the "Daoification" of martial arts only occurred after the emergence of Zhang Sanfeng in the late Ming and Qing Period (p. 253). This claim is speculative in light of Green's (2001) belief that "the origins of Chinese boxing go back as far as the Xia dynasty (twenty-first to sixteenth centuries BC), "making it one of the oldest elements of Chinese culture still practiced" (p. 26).

Although it is unknown to what extent ancient Chinese boxing influenced Chuang Tzu's philosophies, it is certain that Taijiquan contains many core Taoist principles and philosophies, which have been adopted and adapted to contemporary Tai chi. This examination of the chapter Mastering Life (pp. 118-130) describes only a few of Chuang Tzu's philosophies that explore the interconnected nature of Taoism and martial arts.

### **Brian Eno's ambient landscapes and the Taoist body of the earth**

Brian Eno's *Ambient Music* creates a space in which humans are able to engage with ambient landscapes, and through a process of immersion and interaction, a unity is formed between humans, ambient landscapes, and urban and natural environments. This unity parallels core Taoist philosophies, which consider humans and the environment to be one interactive symbiotic identity rather than separate entities (Giblett, 2008b, Kohn, 2006; Schipper, 1978).

This Taoist perspective, which views the embryonic human body, mind and the earth's landscape as one, represented by the nineteenth century image, the *Neijing tu* (Figure 1.1) (Callicott & McRae, 2015, p. 237), shares similarities with the album artwork of Eno's *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (1978).

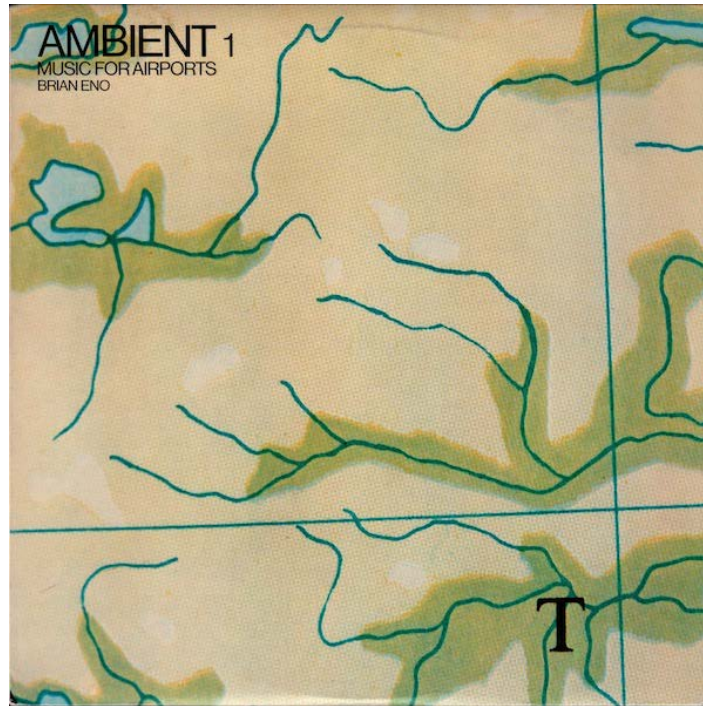


Fig. 1.2: Cover artwork: Ambient 1: Music for Airports (Brian Eno, 1978)

Both the *Neijing tu* (Figure 1.1) and Eno's cover artwork for *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (1978) (Figure 1.2) represent the earth as a human body in an abstract form. The network of vein-like tributaries that snake across Eno's landscape reflect Giblett's (2013) idea that, "for a Taoist, the earth is a body and water is the life-blood of the earth" (p. 19).

Eno, who has often described his ambient landscapes as "organisms" capable of adapting to their environments (Cox & Warner, 2004; Roquet, 2009), has stated on several occasions that he approaches the construction of his ambient landscapes in the same way he approaches painting (Eno, 1978; Tamm, 1989; Toop, 1995). As a recording artist in the late seventies, Eno wanted to make ambient music that could "tint the atmosphere of the location where it was played" (Tamm, 1989, p. 128): to embrace naturally occurring sounds within a listeners' environment and combine them with sounds within his constructed landscapes, so that both environments interconnected. Eno's approach towards creating music was influenced by the work of composer John Cage (Prendergast, 2003; Roquet, 2009; Tamm, 1989). Cage wrote pieces that encouraged performers to create music from plants rather than standard instruments (Kostelanetz, 2004, p. 92). After departing the glam rock band Roxy Music, Eno also favoured the sounds of the natural world, such as rain, insects, and

wind, over the pomposity of rock music (Tamm, 1989, pp. 129-130). Like Cage, who wanted to capture and control sounds from the natural world and use them as musical instruments (Cage, 1973, p. 3), by creating textures within his ambient landscapes, Eno replaced the rock guitar with choruses of carefully synthesized bullfrogs (Toop, 1995, p. 132). It was Eno's belief that "all devices used to create music, including the environment itself, were musical instruments" (p. 138).

In the 1940s, Cage attended lectures about Taoism and Zen Buddhism (Gann, 2010, p. 138), and in the 50s, he began using an ancient Chinese text known as the *I Ching* [ca. 1000-300 BC] to assist in the composition of his experimental music (p. 149). By tossing coins and following the procedures of the *I Ching* [ca. 1000-300 BC], Cage was able to compose music that was created by chance (Grubbs, 2014, p. 91). In a similar way that Cage used the *I Ching* [ca. 1000-300 BC] to determine the random outcome of music, Eno and Peter Schmidt developed cards known as *Oblique Strategies* (1979) to help artists spontaneously alter their perspectives (Marshall & Loydell, 2015, p. 1). Eno would hand musicians cards from *Oblique Strategies* (1979), and let chance dictate the spontaneity of the music.

Eno's use of tape loops to randomly generate music that never repeated itself during the recording process on *Discrete Music* (1975) (Thom, 2008, p. 127) was similar to Cage's experimentation with technology, and his extended tape mix in *Imaginary Landscape No. 5* (1952) (Prendergast, 2003, p. 46). This desire to create ambient landscapes capable of evolving and changing of their own accord not only adheres to Taoist philosophies pertaining to spontaneity (*ziran*) (Allan, 1997, p. 115), it also expresses how Eno desired both the elements within a listener's environment and his ambient landscapes to be in a state of constant change. This process of creating "generative" music that Eno likened to creating a "seed" (Toop, 2004) was used on *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* (1978) to change a "design paradigm to a biological paradigm" (p. 186). Eno states:

In the case of the piano notes I would wait for the note to completely decay well beyond the threshold of normal audibility and cut the loop there. One of the tape loops was seventy-nine feet long and the other eighty-three feet. I would then synchronize five or six loops and get a repetition, which would

generate an unpredictable sound or texture, which always changes. (Eno, as cited in Prendergast, 2003, p. 123)

In *The body of nature and culture* (2008b), Giblett describes the Taoist body of the earth as a field, disease as a weed, and humans as gardeners who tend to their bodies through Taoist body cultivation practices such as Tai chi and meditation (p. xii). In *Haunted weather: Music, silence, and memory* (2004), Eno also approaches his ambient landscapes from an eastern philosophical viewpoint. He states:

A lot of the generative music thing is much more like gardening. When you make a garden, of course you choose some of the things you put in, and of course you have some degree of control over what the thing will be like, but you never know precisely. That's the wonderful thing about gardening. It responds to conditions during its growth and it changes and it's different every year. (Eno, as cited in Toop, 2004, p. 186)

This Taoist perspective, from which Eno's ambient landscapes evolve of their own accord and become living entities capable of interacting with both listeners and their environments, "creates healthy relationships between humans and the earth" (Giblett, 2008b, p. x). In hostile urban environments, where harsh noise proliferates, Eno's ambient landscapes provide respite or a new interpretation of a listener's environment.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

I applied a visual ethnographic methodology to my research due to my desire to interview people, record their activities with a video camera, and to document the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape within Shanghainese parks.

Pink defines ethnography as:

a process of creating and representing knowledge (about a society, culture and individuals) that is based on an ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (Pink, 2007, p. 22)

Pink (2007) suggests, even though a researcher may intend to be reflexive and unbiased when observing 'reality' within a society, it is inevitable that they will 'distort' that 'reality' through their participation while conducting research (p. 23). Hammersely (1990) supports this idea and states that even when conventions of ethnographic research are applied, subjectivity remains an issue, as different people interpret the conventions of ethnographic research differently (p. 9).

In order to gain a greater understanding of my research, at times I became a participant in the activities I documented in *Shanghainese Parklife* (2017). My visual presence in the documentary is minimal, however, and instead I focused primarily upon my participants and their activities. This was due to the fact that I did not want the documentary to be overly comical or contrived and desired the participants to speak with their own voices. Schensul et al. (1999) suggest that it is vital for researchers to find ways to access their research quickly when constraints such as time and money exist (p. 77). By participating in various body cultivation practices I was able to develop strong relationships with my research participants, and save time during the research process.

Although I did not participate in the practices of the absent figures in the landscape in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* (2017), the camera angles I used and the ways in which I presented my research were deliberate and chosen to influence the viewer's perception of the subject matter. Some images were documented in a



photojournalistic style to present the subject in an objective manner, while others were presented in an artistic way to create subjective interpretations. By presenting my research in these two contrasting ways, I suggest that the opinions we form about a subject often relate to its presentation and the context in which it is viewed.

In order to remain flexible when conducting my research in *Shanghainese Parklife*, and to develop a core understanding of various documentary modes, I employed a combination of Bill Nichols' (2010) six documentary modes (pp. 162-211) (see Table 1) to conduct my research.

**Table 2: Bill Nichols' six documentary modes (Brief definitions)**

<b>Observational</b>	No interviews, no commentary or participation from the filmmaker, only observed footage.
<b>Poetic</b>	Often uses montage and filmic techniques in combination with music, voice over or SFX to convey messages.
<b>Participatory</b>	Filmmaker becomes a willing participant in the documentary and can in some cases guide the narrative.
<b>Expository</b>	Reproduces historical information, often uses stock footage, and the voice over technique to recreate incidents.
<b>Reflexive</b>	Draws attention to representations and constructions within the documentary.
<b>Performative</b>	Highly personal and emotive, sometimes poetic, experimental, sometimes contains reenactments.

Although Nichols' constant refinement, name changes, and reconstruction of his modes has created much confusion in an already convoluted debate concerning documentary (Rabiger, 2004, p. 9), and drawn heavy criticism (Bruzzi, 2006; Rosenthal & Corner 2005; Saunders, 2010), Nichols' (2010) six modes of documentary (pp. 162-211) are considered the most widely referenced and influential (Bruzzi, 2006; Ellis & McLane, 2005; Saunders, 2010). Nichols states (2001) "The characteristics within a given mode function as a *dominant* in a given film: they give

structure to the overall film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspect of its organization. Considerable latitude remains possible” (p. 100).

As my research contained interviews and observational footage, the participatory mode and the observational mode acted as my dominant modes. However, as Natusch and Hawkins (2014) found in their analysis of the documentary films *Never Sorry* (2012) and *Helvetica* (2007), all of Nichols’ six modes of documentary can be used effectively in varying degrees in a documentary to create cohesive narratives (p. 103). By experimenting with all of Nichols’ six documentary modes, I was able to assess which modes were best suited to my filmmaking style. This approach also allowed me to refine my technical skills and eliminate ineffective approaches I adopted during the documentary making process.

In *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*, I applied Taoist philosophies and Brian Eno’s theories, which view the human body and the landscape as an interconnected entity (Giblett, 2008b; Kohn, 2006; Eno, 1978), to explore the relationship between the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape within Shanghainese Parks and spontaneous sounds in an ambient soundscape. By recording a one-track ambient soundscape with no layers or loops, and combining it with photographic images of the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape within Shanghainese parks, I found over 50 sounds that serendipitously aligned with certain images.

In *Shanghainese Parklife*, inspired by Eno’s use of tape loops, I constructed a soundscape that used synchronous (sounds that match with the video footage) and asynchronous sound (sounds that don’t match with the video footage), to create a filmic meditation inspired by Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983) in order to express Chuang’s philosophies concerning perceptions of reality (Connolly, 2011, p. 487). While the methods I used to conduct my research for *Shanghainese Parklife* and *Clouds and 4 Cigarettes* often employed different creative and technical devices, the overall intention of my research was to understand how the Tao manifests itself in Shanghainese parks and to explore the entwinement of yin and yang in these creative works.

## **The influence of Rod Giblett's 'Taoist body of the earth' and 'the machine body of Western medicine' in *Shanghainese Parklife***

There are many scenes in *Shanghainese Parklife* that express Rod Giblett's (2008b) theories, which contrast the machine body of Western medicine (p. 19) and the Taoist body of the earth (p. 157). These examples suggest that although many of Shanghai's inhabitants' core beliefs stem from Taoist philosophies (Palmer & Liu, 2012, p. 48) that speak of the interconnected relationship between humans and the earth (Girardot, Miller, & Liu, 2001), 'the Maoist body' of the West and 'the Taoist body' of the East are still at war (as cited in Giblett, 2008b, p.10).



*Fig 2.1: People perform repetitive exercises on a lifeless machine-like structure*



Fig. 2.2: Old lady stretches her muscles on organic exercise equipment

In Fig. 2.1 and Fig. 2.2, I adopted a hybridization of Nichols' (2010) poetic mode (p. 162) and performative mode (p. 199). The poetic element within this hybrid mode was used to show the human forms entwinement with organic and inorganic structures through shape and form (p. 163), while the performative element suggests the inner workings of daily life (p. 201) in post-Mao Shanghai.

In the opening montage of *Shanghai Parklife*, which combines images and an ambient soundscape, I adopted Nichols' poetic mode to express Giblett's (2008b) definition of body culture as "ways in which we understand, perform and make meanings through, with and on our bodies" (p. x).





Fig. 2.3: Representation of the Taoist body of the earth

Influenced by Giblett's (2008b) theories concerning the Taoist body of the earth (p. 157) and the concept of the *Nejing Tu* (Figure 1.1): the lines on the man's tracksuit pants mirror the lines on the tree trunk (Figure 2.3). This opening shot which introduces the viewer to the documentary's subject matter of cultivating the Taoist body was used to provide a visual representation of the core Taoist belief that the human body and the earth are one entity (Giblett, 2008b; Kohn, 2006; Schipper, 1978)



Fig. 2.4: People performing a body cultivation practice mimic the movement of a crane

In Figure 2.4 I combined an ambient soundscape and footage of people performing a body cultivation practice to contrast Giblett's (2008b) Taoist body of the earth (p. 157) and the machine body of Western medicine (p. 19). While the participants are engaged in an activity that connects them with the earth, they also mimic the movement of a crane we momentarily see and hear. As human breath joins with the breath of camphor trees, I wove the sound of a flute amongst the teeth of angle grinders in the form of an ambient soundscape, so that these two worlds could combine.

Giblett (2008b) suggests that Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) saw the human body as “a sort of microcosm of both the machine and the earth, and the earth the macrocosm of the human body” (p. 20). While I chose to show many people in *Shanghainese Parklife*, who exhibit the desire to embrace nature and mimic the movements of animals (Figure 2.5), Yuan Xingboa and the other whip crack masters are intended to provide a contrast to the idealized Taoist body of the earth. While the man holding the tree in Figure 2.3 is rooted to the earth, and the Kung fu master in Figure 2.5 performs the movements of a dragon, Yuan Xingboa (Figure 2.6) appears to be at war with nature as his body becomes one with a machine.



Fig. 2.5: Kung fu master performs the movements of a dragon





Fig. 2.6: Yuan Xingboa at one with the machine

## **The influence of Chuang Tzu's philosophies within *Shanghainese Parklife***

On many occasions during my research, I applied Chuang Tzu's (300 BC/1996) philosophy of what we refer to in the West as 'going with the flow' (p. 119), when the spontaneity of the 'universe' or what Lao Tzu (300 BC/2015) refers to as 'the Tao' (p. 25) presented itself. In the *Tao Te Ching* [ca. 300 BC] Lao Tzu states:

There was something formless and perfect  
before the universe was born.  
It is serene. Empty.  
Solitary. Unchanging.  
Infinite. Eternally present.  
It is the mother of the universe.  
For lack of a better name,  
I call it the Tao.

It flows through all things,  
inside and outside, and returns  
to the origin of all things. (Tzu, 300 BC/2015, p. 25)

Inspired by the films of Fredrick Wiseman, which contain no interviews, no commentary or participation by the filmmaker, and instead only present observed footage, on many occasions I adopted Nichols' observational or 'fly-on-the-wall' mode (Nichols, 2010, p. 172) to capture moments that exhibited the spontaneity of the

Tao. Wiseman's decision to exclusively use the observational mode in *Central Park* (1989) creates a sense of realism and authenticity, which is vastly different from Nichols' (2010) other modes, such as the reflexive (p. 194) and performative modes (p. 199). While these modes draw attention to the constructed nature of the film (p. 194) or the conscious performances of the documentary's participants (p. 199), the observational mode in *Central Park* gives the viewer the impression that they have just witnessed a moment that has been in no way manipulated by the filmmaker.



Fig. 2.7: Diabolo master embodies 'the Way' or the Tao



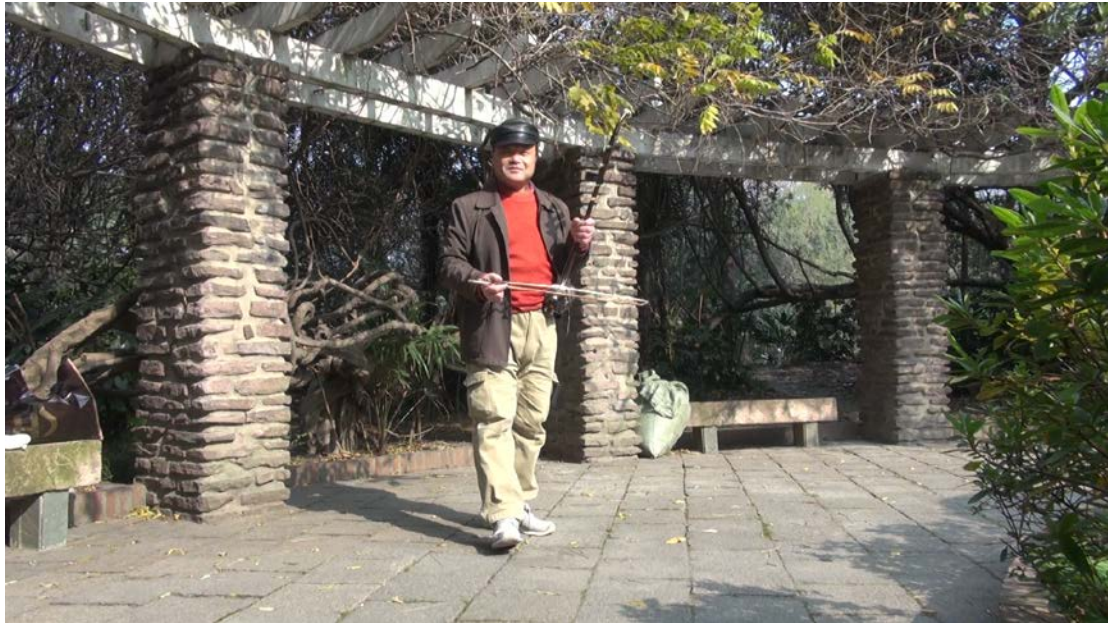


Fig. 2.8: Musician shakes his head in disbelief after realizing a unique spontaneous moment has occurred

In both Figure 2.7 and Figure 2.8 spontaneous performances occurred that surprised the performers and nearby spectators. Rather than edit the end of these performances, which show the surprised reactions of the performers and spectators, I decided to leave them intact. This was done to give the viewer a sense that a unique moment had occurred, in which the performer had momentarily embodied the Tao and expressed its philosophies. In that same way that Wiseman lingers on shots that Hollywood directors would be inclined to cut earlier on in documentaries such as *Central Park*, I often chose to remain on particular shots in an attempt to draw attention to a spontaneous moment and to strengthen a scene's sense of realism.

While Chuang Tzu (300 BC/1996) suggests that sustained practice and conscious refinement of one's practical methods leads to 'the Way' (p. 118), he also propounds that in order to embody 'the Way' or as Lao Tzu calls it 'the Tao', (300 BC/2015, p. 25), an individual must perform an action without consciously thinking about it (Tzu, 300 BC/1996 p. 46).



Fig. 2.9: Shi Hui Zhen moves her body by moving her mind

In the same way that Chuang Tzu's (300 BC/1996) hunchback with a sticky pole was able to embody the Tao, by being aware of only cicada wings, in Figure 2.9 Shi Hui Zhen, became one with "the ten thousand things" (p. 121) or 'life's multitude of intricacies' by relaxing her mental energy and disregarding things that might distract her. When conducting my research, I was drawn to characters such as Shi Hui Zhen, who expressed Chuang Tzu's philosophies and embodied the Way. I employed Nichols' performative mode to align viewers with the participants' "uniqueness of vision" (Natusch & Hawkins, 2014, p. 123) that expressed the Taoist Way through their visually captivating performances,.

### **The role of Zhu Xiangkun in *Shanghainese Parklife***

Although I was originally inspired by the female voice-over narration used in the poetic documentary *Sans Soleil* (1983), and director Wim Wenders' personal narration of his filmic travel diary *Tokyo-GA* (1985), I decided not to use my own voice-over to guide *Shanghainese Parklife*. This was due to a lack of confidence, and the desire not to impose my ideas verbally. I also did not consider myself an expert on body cultivation practices, nor my voiced opinions relevant or necessary in the context of the documentary.

In order to create a bridge between the main characters in *Shanghainese Parklife*, and to provide an expert opinion and historical information about the history of Taoism, I chose to link these sections together with pieces of an interview I conducted with Zhu Xiangkun. As Xiangkun was a Taoist monk at one stage in his life, and is the associate senior doctor in the Shanghai Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine, his role in the documentary was to provide information and theories, and to introduce, summarize, and give credibility to the subject matter presented by the other characters. Apart from Xiangkun's professional qualifications and experience, the confident articulate way in which he addressed the subject matter, his playful, at times tongue-in-cheek approach, and his balanced view of the Taoist school of thought made him a suitable candidate to guide the documentary.

### **The influence of Taoist philosophies and Eno's theories upon the ambient landscape in *Shanghainese Parklife*.**

Chuang Tzu was skeptical of reality and considered it to be an artificial construct (Merton, 1969, p. 11). He adopted an outlook on the world known as perspectivism, in which multiple perspectives of the world are possible and questionable in relation to 'reality' and 'truth' (Connolly, 2011, p. 487). In Eno's ambient landscapes, it is often difficult to distinguish whether sounds made by nature in the 'real world', such as birds or the wind are 'real' or have been 'inorganically' created by synthesizers within a studio. For Chuang Tzu, making distinctions about the nature of 'reality' was insignificant. He believed it was more important for people to embrace spontaneity and immerse themselves in actions and pursuits regardless of their physical forms or the environments in which they dwelled (300 BC/1996).

In the opening and closing sequences in *Shanghainese Parklife*, I adopted Taoist philosophies and Eno's theories to construct an ambient soundscape that plays with notions of reality. According to Eno, a painter is in an "identical position" to a composer in that he or she is "working directly with a material, working directly onto a substance, and always retain the options to chop and change, to paint a bit out, add a piece, etc" (as cited in Cox & Warner, 2004, p. 129). In order to affect what Nichols (2001) describes as a "tone or a mood" within the poetic mode (p. 105), I adopted Eno's technique of using layers and textures from the natural world (Toop, 1995, p.



132) to create a filmic meditation inspired by *Sans Soleil* (1983) by expressing “tones, shapes, contrasts, rhythms, and the relations between all of these” (Barnouw, 1993, p. 78).

One of the many reoccurring sounds I encountered in the parks of Shanghai was the sound of propagandistic music of a contradictory nature. In Figure 2.10 the sound of music reminiscent of China’s Cultural Revolution blasts from the park’s loudspeaker, while in Figure 2.11 the soft tones of a flute and a birdlike voice waft and chirp amongst the leaves of a camphor tree.



*Fig. 2.10:* People perform vigorous exercise to music reminiscent of China’s Cultural Revolution



Fig. 2.11: Old woman knocks on a camphor tree as meditative music plays

When piecing together the final poetic montage in *Shanghainese Parklife*, I decided to extend the soundscape I recorded while filming the old woman knocking a camphor tree, by using Eno's method of looping sounds (Toop, 1995, p. 132).

Unlike the other montage and observational B-roll sections in *Shanghainese Parklife* that contain only synchronous sound, the opening and closing soundscapes contain both synchronous and asynchronous sound. In that, what we see sometimes matches what we hear, while at other times what we hear does not always match what we see. In the same way that Eno considers limitations a means of opening doors (Sheffield, 2014), I embraced at what first seemed like an unsolvable technical problem to add another element to documentary's poetic designs.

At first the sound of the old woman's jacket in Figure 2.11 appeared to be a hindrance when I attempted to create a loop and use this section of the soundscape at the beginning of the documentary. After cutting and rearranging this ambient loop, I figured out a way to match the sound of the old woman's jacket with the sound of what the viewer might perceive to be the sound of the man's tracksuit pants in Figure 2.3. Eno's idea of "Honor thy error as a hidden intention" (as cited in Frere-Jones, 2014, para. 1), found within Eno and Peter Schmidt *Oblique Strategies* (1979), allowed me to embrace my mistake of not recording the soundscape for an adequate

duration, and reflected my subconscious desire to express Chuang Tzu's (300 BC/1996) philosophies of conceptual reality.

## **Drawing attention to the constructed nature of *Shanghainese Parklife***

There are several places in *Shanghainese Parklife*, where I considered it appropriate and necessary to draw attention to the constructed nature of the documentary.



Fig. 3.12: Old man breaks the camera frame



Fig. 3.13: Interviewer's question included

In Figure 3.12 the old man being interviewed does not hear the question, and momentarily abandons his position in front of the camera to move closer to the interviewer. In doing so, the old man no longer directly addresses the viewer, but instead breaks the camera frame, and draws attention to the contrived nature of filmmaking and its technical limitations. This footage was not only included for comic purposes. By including this spontaneous 'mistake', I desired the viewer to gain an insight into the personality of the invisible interviewer.

As the illusions of the documentary's filmic devices were now unveiled, in the following scene, shown in Figure 3.13 I included the interviewer's questions. By employing these elements of Nichols' (2010) reflexive mode (p. 194) it was my intention to endear the viewer to both the well-mannered respectful interviewer, and the old man and woman who were hard of hearing. Rather than edit out these moments, it was my intention to provide a space in which the viewer could engage with the filmmaker, the interviewer, and the participants on a personal level.

### ***Clouds and 4 Cigarettes* - Development of narrative structure**

After the editing process was complete, 312 photos of the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape were placed into categories and arranged in the following chronological order in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*: personal effects, utensils, food, bodily fluids/waste/secretions, health related objects, pleasure, containers, umbrellas, household objects, chairs, electrical wires, technology, metal objects, unidentifiable objects, reflections, flowers/representations, cartoons/representations, art, faces, hearts, balls, toys, creatures, glass, automobile, amusement rides, playing cards, other places, sculptures, plastic, object as landscape, and pure trash.

Rather than placing these photos together in a random fashion, I placed them within groups that shared similar objects and themes. By commencing *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* with photos of people's personal effects, such as clothing, wallets, name tags, etc., I wished to emphasize the traces of the absent figure within the landscape and to create a sense of identity. Through creating a sense of numerous identities, it was my intention to suggest the idea that humans share a responsibility to protect the environment, both individually and collectively.

While I often represented the traces of the absent figure in an artistic way through the use of camera angles, lighting, inclusion, exclusion, scale, juxtaposition, and suggestion to stimulate the viewer's visual interest, my greater intention was to create a feeling of uneasiness in the viewer and to generate a reflexive internal discourse concerning the nature of human relationships with the environment.

Rather than conclude *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* with aesthetically pleasing images, I wanted the final category to document rather than stylize the traces of the absent figure in the landscape in order to send a clear message: the aesthetics of the artistic medium and presentation should not ignore the reality of a complex sociological issue that impacts upon the environment.

## **The influence of Taoist philosophies and Eno's theories upon the ambient landscape in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*.**

Influenced by Taoist philosophies and Eno's theories, concerning the interconnected relationship between humans and the landscape (Giblett, 2008b; Kohn, 2006; Eno, 1978), it was my intention to create a soundscape for *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* that embodied these ideas. In Eno's ambient landscapes, humans are often absent and subtly immersed in the landscape. The presence of humans occurs in such forms as footsteps, scratching fingers, or a cough. Eno suggests that "when a landscape ceases to be a backdrop for something else to happen in front of it, everything that happens is a part of the landscape" (Eno, 1986, p. 2). Rather than recording in a place in which human sounds dominated the landscape, such as a park or a busy street, I decided to find a location where the sounds of nature were the backbone of the landscape, and the sounds of humans and machines moved in and out of the soundscape like arms and legs.

In his *Ambient Music Manifesto* (1978), Eno states that advancements in technology allowed him to approach the process of making music from the perspective of a painter (p. 1). Tang Dynasty artworks such as Ma Yuan's *Poet drinking by moonlight* (Figure 2.14), which were influenced by Taoist philosophies, exhibit similarities to Eno's ambient landscapes. In *Poet drinking by moonlight*, the human figure within the landscape is minute in comparison to its surrounding environment. Unlike Western artworks from the same period, which emphasized the human figure, paintings influenced by Taoism placed greater significance upon the landscape (Watts, 2006, p. 116). Although it was my intention to become a part of the ambient soundscape in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*, like the tiny figures in *Poet drinking by moonlight*, I wished to blend into the landscape rather draw attention to my presence.





Fig. 2.14: Ma Yuan (ca 1500) *Poet drinking by moonlight* (Tang Dynasty)

As I did not wish to create an interpretive piece of music with standard instruments to accompany the images in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*, I instead adopted Eno's approach of using the landscape as an instrument (Toop, 1995, p. 132). In a similar fashion to the way in which John Cage used the limbs of plants as instruments in *Child of Tree* (1975) and *Branches* (1976) (Kostelanetz, 2004, p. 92), my cigarette lighter and a chocolate bar wrapper became instruments within the ambient soundscape.

## **Choosing a location**

The sound of music from loud speakers, hammering and drilling, and people's lengthy conversations made it impossible to record a soundscape in one of the parks I had taken images in. While I desired the sounds of humans performing activities within the landscape, I did not want the sound of specific activities that would be incongruous with the images in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*. I also did not want the sound of activities that produced overly repetitive sounds of an extended duration. Instead I desired a good variation of sounds that randomly entered and exited the landscape: sounds that entwined with it, rather than imposed upon it, or dominated it. The only constant distinguishable sound that I wanted was the sound of birds.

After several location scouts and trial recordings, I chose to record the soundscape under a camphor tree in an apartment complex. The location was a good distance from a major road, and the apartment buildings helped to dampen the unwanted sound of traffic. I positioned a directional mic at a 45-degree angle facing a pocket of trees opposite a crossroads that lead to the different apartment blocks, and recorded the sound through a video camera.

The time of day that I recorded was of crucial importance to the overall design of the soundscape. Like Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929)—but in a more subtle form—I wanted to create a sense of a sleeping landscape that gradually comes to life with the sounds of nature, humans and machines. In order to create this feeling, I started recording at 6.30AM. Most of the residents in nearby apartments were sleeping, but the sounds of many birds could be heard. After about ten minutes people began to emerge from their apartments: some hurrying to work or school, while others approached life at a more leisurely pace with their dogs, bicycles, and fitness routines.

## **The spontaneity of the ambient landscape**

By finding an ideal location that adhered to certain technical specifications, due to constantly changing elements within the landscape, it was possible for me to record endless variations of similar soundscapes. The spontaneity of the sounds in the landscape where I chose to record was not always desirable however. On one occasion, a man sweeping leaves wished to converse with me. At another time a

group of dogs began barking loudly. When it rained I was not able to record without the sound of droplets hitting the umbrella above my head. And although wind can be very pleasing to the ear when recorded correctly, it was also a dangerous foe that could suddenly sabotage a soundscape 45 minutes into recording.

The risk of recording a continuous hour-long ambient soundscape was that at any moment, the spontaneity of the sounds within the landscape could suddenly render my recordings unusable. As I did not want to loop parts of the soundscape or overlay certain sounds, it was a challenge to capture a dynamic soundscape that complimented the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape. Even though I was able to employ a few techniques to stop people from conversing with me, and kept a close eye on the weather, persistence was what yielded the final *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* soundscape.

## **Trusting the Tao**

As the narrative structure for *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* was conceived before the ambient soundscape was recorded, I was aware that spontaneous occurrences within the ambient landscape would create sounds that may or may not align with the chronological order of the images in the documentary. My desire to create an ambient soundscape of one constantly changing track with no loops or layers of inserted sounds, meant that I could not choose to align certain sounds with particular images. This conscious decision not to construct the ambient soundscape in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* was born out of a desire to let the spontaneity of the Tao dictate the sounds within the landscape. In doing so, when I placed the one-track ambient soundscape I recorded for *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* together with the images of the traces of the absent figure and creature in the landscape, I identified over 50 sounds that serendipitously aligned with particular images.

These serendipitous alignments are capable of creating audiovisual meditations, in that when we see and hear these serendipitous alignments our imagination is capable of taking us to places in our minds that exist beyond what we hear and see on the screen. When an alignment occurs, the viewer momentarily reinterprets the literal image and sound and generates new thoughts or images. While I identified over 50

sounds that serendipitously aligned with particular images in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*, it is possible that another person might find 23, 62, or any another number depending upon how they interpret the images and sounds.

### **An interpretation of the first 20 sounds and images in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* that serendipitously align**

- 1) Cigarette 1 opens flip top shoe (2.43)
- 2) Bald person walks by in slippers (4.47)
- 3) Bag on wheels departs as Converse sneakers dry (6.23)
- 4) Bag on wheels departs as teeth of bag zipper smile (6.33)
- 5) Bicycle appears then leaves with red purse (7.51)
- 6) Moth wallet becomes a plane (8.06)
- 7) Moth flies over tent wallet (8.17)
- 8) Old man crinkles candy bar wrapper as nametag rusts (9.22)
- 9) Loud bird sounds echo inside eggshell (11.13)
- 10) Banana smiles as person walks by (12.08)
- 11) People depart and leave shiny blood behind (12.18)
- 12) Door slams and turd paper remains (12.26)
- 13) Footsteps and monkey head phlegm converse (12.41)
- 14) Footsteps leave behind a bag of shit (13.00)
- 15) Plaster suckles leaves as cigarette number 2 ignites (13.59)
- 16) Spit splatters on leaking condoms (15.19)
- 17) Light bulb leg shard hears cigarette number 3 spark (18.39)
- 18) Man clears throat as scissors breathe (18.48)
- 19) Bag on wheels emerges from tape recorder (24.15)
- 20) Rusty bicycle falls from long white pole (26.24)

### **The serendipitous alignment of sounds and images manifested by the Tao**

I believe the serendipitous alignment of particular sounds and images in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* is a manifestation of the Tao. Some alignments create logical associations, in that we hear a sound that might be created by the object shown in the picture, such as footsteps created by a slipper (Figure 2.15). While in other cases the audiovisual



meditation that occurs as a result of the association between the image and sound we hear might be more complex and interpretive, such as the tension that mounts on a mysterious hook as a bag on wheels departs (Figure 2.16) or a unidentifiable sound which resembles Snow White ruffling her dress (Figure 2.17).



*Fig. 2.15: Image of shoe, sound of footsteps*



*Fig. 2.16: Tension mounts on a mysterious hook as a bag on wheels departs*



Fig. 2.17: Unidentifiable sound resembles Snow White ruffling her dress

While it was my intention to record an ambient soundscape that embodied Taoist philosophies and Eno's theories concerning the relationship between humans and the landscape, I cannot take credit for or adequately explain the serendipitous alignment of sounds and images manifested by the Tao in *Clouds and 4 cigarettes*. My interpretive analysis of these spontaneous alignments is merely my own imagination attempting to grasp the "ungraspable Tao" (Tzu, 300 BC/2015, p. 21).

### **Chapter 3: The space where *Shanghainese Parklife* and *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* coexist**

In attempting to understand the space in which *Shanghainese Parklife* and *Clouds and 4 Cigarettes* coexist, it is important to consider the ways in which Lao Tzu (ca. 600-400 BC) and Chuang Tzu (ca. 550-250 BC) (Robinet, 1997, p. 25) speak of the Tao.

When Master Tung-kuo asked Chuang Tzu, “This thing called the Way—where does it exist?”

Chuang Tzu said “There’s no place it doesn’t exist.”

“Come,” said Master Tung-kuo, “you must be more specific!”

“It is in the ant.”

“As low a thing as that?”

“It is in the panic grass.”

“But that’s lower still!”

“It is in the tiles and shards.”

“How can it be so low?”

“It is in the piss and shit.” (Tzu, 300 BC/1996, p. 16)

While Lao Tzu (300 BC/2015), speaks of the Tao as “formless and perfect,” (p. 25) Chuang Tzu’s (300 BC/1996) idea that the Tao exists in human excrement, provides some understanding of how Lao Tzu’s philosophies present an idealized or romanticized perception of the Tao. This is not to say that Lao Tzu ignores the Tao that “gives birth to both good and evil,” (p. 5) or the Tao “that is content with the low places that people disdain,” (p. 8), instead it suggests that while Taoist body cultivation practices such as Tai chi seek to present Taoism in its most perfect form, the traces of the absent figure and creature within Shanghainese parks indicate the presence of the Tao in a darker form.

In the opening passage of the *Tao Te Ching* [ca. 300 BC], Lao Tzu (300 BC/2015) states “mystery and manifestations arise from the same source. This source is called darkness. Darkness within darkness. The gateway to all understanding” (p. 1).

My intention in *Shanghainese Parklife* was to present Taoism in its most idealistic and romanticized form, and for *Clouds and 4 Cigarettes* to explore the darkness that exists beneath the leaves of camphor trees where cats go to die and humans shed their rubber skins. Within the same space that humans heal their bodies and become one

with the earth, the darker side of human nature feels a compulsion to poison the body of the earth.

*In Clouds and 4 Cigarettes*, a form of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) grotesque realism exists in the excess of the absent figure within Shanghainese Parks. This gluttonous self-indulgent body is at odds with Giblett's (2008b) Taoist body of the earth (p. 157), yet it occupies the same space.

Giblett suggests:

The grotesque is the place in a culture to which the discarded misfits of meaning run to wallow in a mire of monstrosity. The grotesque is a dangerous swamp of monstrosity. Grotesque places are not only geographical places but also corporeal places, both earthly and bodily. (Giblett, 2008b, p. 57)

Although some scholars paint Taoist landscapes as primordial paradises, Cooper (2014) suggests that even in the times of Taoism's ancient philosophers, the environments they speak of are very much humanized landscapes with parks, farms, and places in which people are engaged in activities (p. 100). In Eno's ambient landscapes "apart from the airport, two particular landscapes are repeatedly invoked in his ambient music: the cultured gray Manhattan cityscape of the earlier releases, and the kind of marshy, insect – and bird-populated natural habitat that permeates *On Land*" (Roquet, 2009, p. 367). While Giblett (2008b) speaks of the Taoist body of the earth in tongues of land, mountainous backbones, gushing arteries, and delicious placenta dripping wetlands (p. 1), in the bulrushes of Eno's *On Land* (1982), creatures breed in the reeds of Giblett's (2008b) monstrous body of the slimy depths: a place the feminine regulates birth (p. 74).

Taoism's most sacred text, the *Tao Te Ching* [ca. 300 BC], speaks of understanding the masculine but keeping to the feminine (Tzu, 300 BC/2015). In the linear notes which accompany Eno's *Ambient Music Manifesto* (1978), he employs the feminine pronoun "her" when referring to music composers (Cox & Warner, 2004, p. 95). In good translations of the *Tao Te Ching* [ca. 300 BC] "the great sage", or "master", is referred to as both feminine and masculine. Giblett (1996) believes the wetlands are places "men are loath to go", (p. 4) however this is where Eno comfortably lurks with the toads in bubbling ponds within *Ambient 4: On Land* (1982) and the itchy swamps



of *Music for Films* (1978).

While many conservationists argue for landscapes that promote ecologically sustainable relationships between humans and the environment (Giblett, 2008b, p. x), uncontrollable urbanization has forced a large percentage of the world's population to live in harsh urban environments. These places are often inorganic or unnatural in the classical sense, but are 'real' in that people must adapt and mentally transcend their hostility. Not unlike Chuang Tzu's (300 BC/1996) Taoist philosophies, which embrace the relationship between yin and yang and the cycle of birth and death (p. 103), Eno also wanted to create ambient landscapes, which allowed people to feel "it's not that big a deal if I die," (cited in Cox & Warner, 2004, p. 96).

Chuang Tzu states:

When yin and yang go awry, then heaven and earth see astounding sights. Then we hear the crash and roll of thunder, and fire comes in the midst of rain and burns up the great pagoda tree. Delight and sorrow are there to trap man on either side so that he has no escape. Fearful and trembling, he can reach no completion. His mind is as though trussed and suspended between heaven and earth, bewildered and lost in delusion. Profit and loss rub against each other and light the constant fires that burn up the inner harmony of the mass of men. The moon cannot put out the fire, so that in time all is consumed and the Way comes to an end. (Tzu, 300 BC/1996, 132)

Lao Tzu (300 BC/2015) speaks of the Tao as the Mother of the earth: a Mother who does not take sides and embraces both sinners and saints (p. 5). The place where *Shanghainese Parklife* and *Clouds and 4 cigarettes* coexist is a mysterious place, a dark and unnamable place (p. 1) where horror and beauty exist.

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